THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

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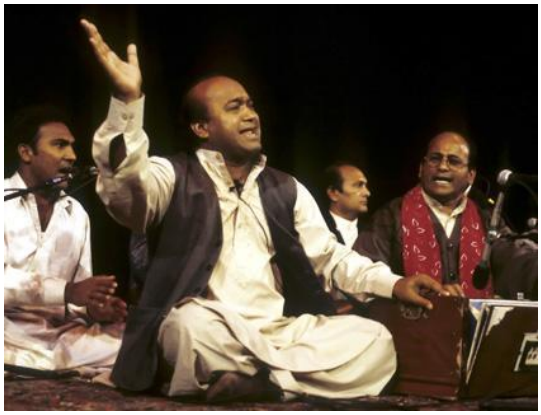

The Qawwals of Pakistan – Mehr Ali & Sher Ali

CMA's VIVA! & Gala Around Town Presents Sufi Devotional Music by The Qawwals of Pakistan

"Soaring…vibrant…music fueled by its own jubilation." – The New York Times

CLEVELAND (March 26, 2008)—The Cleveland Museum of Art's (CMA) acclaimed **VIVA! & Gala Around Town** concert series presents the third concert in the "Music of Central Asia and the Near East" mini-series: **The Qawwals of Pakistan**, Sufi Devotional Music with featured performers **Mehr** and **Sher Ali**, on April 17, 2008 at 7:30 p.m. in Murch Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History.

With just two instruments, a handful of voices, and a complex undercurrent of synchronized hand-clapping, this *qawwali* ensemble produces some of the most jubilant music you are likely to hear. The use of Sufi lyrics in praise of divine and human love adds a mysterious beauty to the singing. This vocal tradition was widely popularized by Nusrat Fateh Ali Kahn through his concerts and collaborations with the likes of Peter Gabriel.

Qawwali is a style of Sufi devotional music, spiritual in essence, used to attain trance and mystical experience – originating in the 10th century and blossoming into its present form from the 13th century onwards. Qawwali blends Iranian and Central Asian poetic, philosophical and musical elements into a North Indian base, combining popular music with classical traditions.

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Strong voices and explosive hand-clapping characterize Qawwali, marked by rhythmic improvisatory repetition of short phrase. An ensemble of usually twelve male performers convey a religious message through music and song based on mystic poetry and texts penned by Sufi masters. **The Qawwals of Pakistan** believe the music goes beyond the limitations of orthodox religion and is a universal invitation to all living beings to share in the feelings of the powerful emotion of pure love, the pain of separation and the joy of union.

The Qawwals of Pakistan consist of brothers, Mehr and Sher Ali; Mehr's 28-year-old son, Mubarak Ali; Sher's 24-year-old son, Ejaz Ali; and 33-year-old Qamar Ali, son of the late original drummer for The Qawwals of Pakistan, Amjad Ali.

Mehr and **Sher Ali** were born in the Pakistani border-town of Kasur in the early 1950s and received their earlier training in classical music from their father, a court classical singer. The brothers were both trained in Sufi philosophy, poetry, texts and rituals and taught by ordained Sufi *qawwal*, **Mehr** by Muhammad Ali Fareedi and **Sher** by Bakhshi Salamat Ali Qawwal.

Q*awwals* must have a deep knowledge of Sufi poetic texts, which often means sacrificing musical quality to retain purity of text. **Mehr** and **Sher Ali** are *qawwals* who have achieved the rare combination of both musical quality and authentic text rendition: **Sher** is known for his ability to understand the important of rhythm and render classical modes in a strong voice; while **Mehr's** heart-rending high-pitched voice strikes the heart when the poetry contains words of entreaty or sorrow.

The Qawwals of Pakistan is a harmonious balance of experience and vigor that has matured to a high art. This ensemble treats the audience to a musical and phrasal symmetry, with music that brings harmony and peace to the soul and projects the message of love and unity for all.

Admission to the performance is $35; $33 for CMA members. Special group and student rates are available. To purchase tickets call the CMA Box Office at 1-888-CMA-0033 or on online at www.clevelandart.org/tickets. The Qawwals of Pakistan perform in Murch Auditorium at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History located at 1 Wade Oval Drive in Cleveland. Valet parking will be available for $5.

VIVA! & Gala Around Town

The next performance in the **VIVA! & Gala Around Town** series will be a FREE organ recital by **Paul Jacobs** on April 20, 2008 in the Trinity Cathedral on Euclid Avenue in Cleveland. Paul Jacobs has reinvigorated the American organ scene with his once-in-a-generation gift as a performer. He's been applauded for his phenomenal technique and memory, charismatic stage presence, huge repertoire spanning five centuries, and the sense of showmanship he brings to an instrument more usually associated with staid and reserved performances. He performs a program of works by J. S. Bach.

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The Ohio Arts Council helped fund this program with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The programs are also made possible by The Ernest L. and Louise M. Gartner Fund, The P. J. McMyler Musical Endowment Fund, The Anton and Rose Zverina Music Fund, The Musart Society and Margaret W. Wong & Associates, Co., LPA.

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The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is one of America's leading comprehensive art museums. Its permanent collection is world renowned for its quality and breadth, spanning 6,000 years. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarships and art acquisitions. The Cleveland Museum of Art receives operating support from the Ohio Arts Council through state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans. The Cleveland Museum of Art is generously funded by Cuyahoga County residents through Cuyahoga Arts and Culture. For more information on the museum, its holdings, programs, services and events, call 1-888-CMA-0033 or visit www.ClevelandArt.org.

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Photo courtesy of World Music Institute.